

## Certification Programs for Vermont Businesses Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### **Introduction**

These FAQs will provide basic information on business certification. We believe the resources listed below are effective to meet the contracting requirements of government agencies and prime contractors. However, every business is different as are their needs. We encourage you to contact these organizations to determine if their certification process is the most applicable for your business.

### **1. How is a “minority-owned business” defined?**

Although definitions vary, in general a minority-owned business is a for-profit enterprise, physically located in the United States or its trust territories, which is owned, operated, and controlled by minority group member(s). "Minority group members" most often identified are US citizens who are Asian, African-American, Hispanic, and Native American (for a complete listing, see <http://www.sba.gov/library/cfrs/13cfr124.html>). Ownership by minority individuals means the business is at least 51 percent owned by such individuals or, in the case of a publicly-owned business, at least 51 percent of the stock is owned by one or more such individuals. Further, the management and daily operations are controlled by those minority group members.

### **2. How is a "woman-owned small business" defined?**

The Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR) defines a "woman-owned small business concern" in Part 19.001 Definitions, as follows: "Woman-owned small business concern means a small business concern—(a) which is at least 51 percent owned by one or more women; or, in the case of any publicly owned business, at least 51 percent of the stock of which is owned by one or more women; and (b) whose management and daily business operations are controlled by one or more women."

### **3. Does my business need to be certified?**

You do not need to be a certified business to operate in the State of Vermont. However, you must register your business with the Vermont Secretary of State's Office (<http://www.sec.state.vt.us/corps/corpindex.htm>).

If you chose to seek certification, you can choose between “self-certification” and “agency certification.” Self-certification involves a relatively simple application process where the owner swears, in writing, to their minority or woman-owned, or Service Disabled Veteran owned status. This can be sufficient for many business opportunities. For those who need a more rigorous certification, agency certification requires a detailed application and often an on-site visit.

### **4. What are the advantages to certification?**

Certification can provide visibility for your business (through business directories), contracting opportunities with both private and government agencies, and some discounts on services and technical assistance.

## 5. Who are the certifiers available to Vermont-based businesses?

There are a number of state and federal government programs offering self-certification and “agency” certification.

### *For self-certification:*

Agency of Natural Resources (State of Vermont). The **Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) Program** assists minority and woman-owned businesses to become involved in the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation competitive bid process. This is a self-certifying process. There is no fee.

<http://www.anr.state.vt.us/dec/fed/fed.htm>

Donald Robisky, [Donald.robisky@state.vt.us](mailto:Donald.robisky@state.vt.us) 802.241.3734

Department of Buildings & General Services (State of Vermont) administers a **Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) Program** and offers a self-certification. Material is not available online; however, an application can be requested by calling 802.828.2211 or VT Dept. of Buildings & General Services, Purchasing & Contract Administration, 1078 US Route 2 – Middlesex, Montpelier, VT 05633. There is no fee.

Bob Rea, [bob.rea@state.vt.us](mailto:bob.rea@state.vt.us) 802.828.5651

**The Vermont Business Registry** is an online searchable database of many Vermont businesses. This is a self-entry system that allows you to add your own business information. There is no fee.

[www.vermontbusinessregistry.com](http://www.vermontbusinessregistry.com)

Robin Miller, [robin@thinkvermont.com](mailto:robin@thinkvermont.com) 802.828.5240

**Central Contractor Registration (Department of Defense CCR)** is an integrated database of small businesses and registration is required for all federal contracts. Go to <http://www.ccr.gov/> and click “new registration.” Businesses can be searched by clicking “CCR Search,” however a search for certified 8(a) firms, HUBZone firms, Small Disadvantaged Business, etc. must be made by clicking “Dynamic Small Business Search.” There is no fee.

### *For Agency Certification:*

Agency of Transportation (State of Vermont). The **Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) Program** encourages and supports the participation of companies owned and controlled by socially and economically disadvantaged individuals (generally women and minorities) **in transportation contracts**. The business must be at least 51 percent owned and controlled by a socially and economically disadvantaged individual (s). There is no fee.

<http://www.aot.state.vt.us/civilrights/DBE.htm>

Colleen Montague, [colleen.montague@state.vt.us](mailto:colleen.montague@state.vt.us) 802.828.2715

The **Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC)** offers a certification program for woman-owned businesses. The business must be 51 percent owned by a woman or women with US Citizenship or US Resident Alien Status; demonstrate control as evidenced by signature role on loans, leases and contracts; and show proof of effective management of the business (operating position, by-laws, hire-fire and other decision-making role). There is a fee for this service. <http://www.wbenc.org>

The **National Women's Business Owners Corporation (NWBOC)** offers a national certification program for woman-owned and controlled businesses. In order to be certified, the woman business owner must be a US citizen and active in the daily management of her business. The business must serve a useful business function. In order to be eligible for certification, the two basic principles of business ownership and control must be met. There is a fee for this service. <http://www.nwboc.org>

The **National Minority Supplier Development Council (NMSDC)** has standardized procedures to assure consistent and identical review and certification of minority-owned businesses. There is a fee for this service. <http://www.nmsdc.org/index.html>

### ***Other Certification Programs:***

**8(a) Business Development Program** (US Small Business Administration) helps small disadvantaged businesses access the federal procurement market. The applicant firm must: (1) be a small business; (2) be unconditionally owned and controlled by one or more socially and economically disadvantaged individuals who are of good character and citizens of the United States; and (3) must demonstrate potential for success. Some 8(a) participants receive federal contracts reserved for the 8(a) program through sole source or limited competition awards. Once certified, the firm is added to an on-line registry maintained in CCR Dynamic Small Business Search. There is no fee.

<http://www.sba.gov/8abd/>

Brenda Plastridge, [Brenda.plastridge@sba.gov](mailto:Brenda.plastridge@sba.gov) 802.828.4422, x206

**Small Disadvantaged Business** (US Small Business Administration SDB) is a certification for small businesses that meet specific social, economic, ownership, and control eligibility criteria. Once certified, the firm is added to an online registry maintained in CCR Dynamic Small Business Search. SDB certification strictly pertains to benefits in Federal procurement. There is no fee. <http://www.sba.gov/sdb/>

Brenda Plastridge, [Brenda.plastridge@sba.gov](mailto:Brenda.plastridge@sba.gov), 802.828.4422, x206

**Service-Disabled Veteran** is a self-certification for small businesses. However, any interested party may protest that status. If that happens the firm needs to know that they would have to show that the businesses is at least 51% owned and controlled by one or more service-disabled veterans and provide documentation from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs or Defense showing that they meet the definition of service-disabled veteran set forth in FAR Part 2.101, Definitions. Al Hall, [albert.hall@sba.gov](mailto:albert.hall@sba.gov) 802-828-4422 x207

The **HUBZone Empowerment Contracting Program** (US Small Business Administration) encourages economic development in historically underutilized business zones - "HUBZones" - through the establishment of preferences. To qualify, a small business must: 1) be located in a "historically underutilized business zone" or HUBZone; (<http://map.sba.gov/hubzone/init.asp#address>); 2) at least 51% owned and controlled by

one or more US Citizens; and 3) have at least 35 percent of their employees residing in a HUBZone. Once certified, the firm is added to an on-line registry maintained in CCR Dynamic Small Business Search. [http://www.sba.gov/hubzone/Brenda Plastridge](http://www.sba.gov/hubzone/Brenda%20Plastridge), [Brenda.plastridge@sba.gov](mailto:Brenda.plastridge@sba.gov) 802.828.4422, x206

## **6. Where can I find directories of other minority and woman-owned businesses?**

### **Vermont Agency of Transportation**

<http://www.aot.state.vt.us/civilrights/DBEDirectory.htm>

### **Vermont Agency of Natural Resources**

<http://www.anr.state.vt.us/dec/fed/dbe/DBElist.htm>

### **Vermont Business Assistance Network (VBAN)**

<http://www.vermontbidsystem.com/>

### **Centralized Contractor Registration (CCR) System**

<http://www.ccr.gov> (click Dynamic Small Business Search)

## **7. How can I sell to the Federal Government?**

**Government Marketing Assistance Center** (State of Vermont GMAC) assists with government registrations and qualified government contractor status. GMAC can help develop targeted marketing strategies and provide technical assistance from bid preparation to final payment.

[www.thinkvermont.com](http://www.thinkvermont.com)

Greg Maguire, Director, [greg@thinkvermont.com](mailto:greg@thinkvermont.com), 802.828.5237

Robin Miller, Information Technology Specialist, [robin@thinkvermont.com](mailto:robin@thinkvermont.com)  
802.828.5240

**Vermont Business Assistance Network** (State of Vermont VBAN) allows businesses to: search for new contracting opportunities with federal, state, and local governments, market your business to visitors to Vermont, list products and services, and find vendors and suppliers.

[www.vermontbusinessregistry.com](http://www.vermontbusinessregistry.com)

Greg Maguire, [greg@thinkvermont.com](mailto:greg@thinkvermont.com), 802.828.5237

Robin Miller, [robin@thinkvermont.com](mailto:robin@thinkvermont.com), 802.828.5240

**FedBizOpps.gov** is the single government point-of-entry (GPE) for Federal government procurement opportunities over \$25,000. Agencies publicize their business opportunities by posting information directly to FedBizOpps via the Internet. Through one portal - FedBizOpps (FBO) - commercial vendors seeking Federal markets for their products and services can search, monitor, and retrieve opportunities solicited by the entire Federal contracting community.

<http://www.eps.gov/index.html>

**The Offices of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBUs).** Most federal agencies have designated a point of contact for women business owners in the Offices of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBUs). They offer small business information on procurement opportunities, guidance on procurement procedures, and identification of both prime and subcontracting opportunities.  
<http://www.sba.gov/GC/osdbu.html>

**Register** your business with federal government contractor databases.  
[www.womenbiz.gov](http://www.womenbiz.gov)

**Download** *Selling to the Federal Government*. This guide offers a step-by-step introduction to the world of federal contracting and demystifies the technical and marketing challenges that contracting involves.  
<http://www.sba.gov/womeninbusiness/selling.html>

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